

Epidemiologic Word of the Week:

Screening

Laboratory tests for screening are used in people who are asymptomatic to classify their likelihood of having a particular disease. The screening procedure is not the only basis for the diagnosis of illness. Patients with positive test results are referred for subsequent testing or examination to provide the physician with more information to determine if they have the disease in question.

For example: There is a health fair in the mall where they are doing blood pressure (BP) *screening* - taking the BP of people who stop by. The generally accepted range for a “normal” BP is < 120/80 mm Hg. A BP greater than 140/90 mm Hg requires medical treatment. These people are likely not symptomatic, and would be asked if they actually have hypertension.

One would expect to find a few of the hundreds of people in a mall to have an elevated BP. One measure of a person’s BP does not tell that they have hypertension, but may indicate there may be a problem. These individuals would be told to check with their doctors.

